

impossible, possible. Finally, it celebrates the courageous spirit of the American people.

PENDING NOMINATION OF BILL LANN LEE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today in communities all around the country and here at the United States Capitol, Asian Pacific Americans are leading all Americans in a demonstration of our commitment to one America, equal opportunity and equal justice under law by urging the Senate to vote on the nomination of Bill Lann Lee to head the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice. I hear the call of the Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus, the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus for prompt Senate consideration and a vote on this highly-qualified nominee and dedicated public servant. I commend the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans and their Chair Daphne Kwok, the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium for their leadership in connection with this matter and their commitment to fundamental fairness.

Today is the second anniversary of the initial nomination of Bill Lann Lee to the office of Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. I repeat today what I have said before: It is past time to do the right thing, the honorable thing, and report this qualified nominee to the Senate so that the Senate may fulfill its constitutional duty under the advice and consent clause and vote on this nomination without further delay. Two years is too long to wait for Senate action on this important nomination.

Yesterday, I was privileged to attend a meeting with the President of the United States in the East Room of the White House in which he issued a challenge to the lawyers of our country to rededicate themselves to help build one America and realize the American dream of equality for all under the law. What kind of message is the Senate sending when it refuses to act on the nomination of this outstanding Asian Pacific American?

After Bill Lann Lee graduated from Yale and then Columbia Law School he could have spent his career in the comfort and affluence of any one of the nation's top law firms. He chose, instead, to spend his career on the front lines, helping to open the doors of opportunity to those who struggle in our society. His is an American story. The son of immigrants whose success can be celebrated by all Americans.

In my view, Bill Lann Lee should be commended for the years he worked to provide legal services and access to our justice system for those without the financial resources otherwise to retain counsel. His work should be a source of pride and a basis for praise. His career should be a model for those who take up the challenge that the President

enunciated yesterday to lawyers across this country. I say that Bill Lann Lee represented the best of the legal profession while serving those without means.

It appears that some on the Republican side want to hold the Lee nomination as a partisan trophy—to kill it through obstruction and delay rather than allowing the Senate to vote up or down on the nomination. This effort started with a letter from the former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, to the Republican Majority Leader of the Senate in 1997. Over the ensuing weekend progress toward confirmation of this nomination ground to a halt. Speaker Gingrich is gone but the disastrous consequence of his unjustified opposition to this nomination lingers. It is past time to put past injustice to rest. As speaker after speaker reiterated today across the country, it is time for the Senate to vote on the nomination of Bill Lann Lee.

Bill Lann Lee's skills, his experience, the compelling personal journey that he and his family have traveled, his commitment to full opportunity for all Americans—these qualities appeal to the best in us. Let us affirm the best in us. Let the Senate vote on the confirmation of this good man. We need Bill Lann Lee's proven problem-solving abilities in these difficult times with apparent hate crimes on the rise across the country. He is spearheading efforts against hate crimes, against modern slavery and for equal justice for all Americans.

If the Senate is allowed to decide, I believe he will be confirmed and will move this country forward to a time when discrimination will subside and affirmative action is no longer needed; a time when each child—girl or boy, black or white, rich or poor, urban or rural, regardless of national or ethnic origin and regardless of sexual orientation or disability—shall have a fair and equal opportunity to live the American dream.

Earlier this year Congress voted to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Mrs. Rosa Parks. I heard Mrs. Parks, Reverend Jackson and the President each take the occasion to remind us that the struggle for equality is not over.

I will ask the Judiciary Committee again tomorrow, in the spirit of fairness, that the Committee recognize the 18-month stewardship of the Civil Rights Division of Bill Lann Lee, his qualifications, and his quiet dignity and strength and send his nomination to the full Senate so that the United States Senate may, at long last, vote on that nomination and, I hope, confirm this fine American to full rank as the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

When confirmed Bill Lann Lee will be the first Asian Pacific American to be appointed to head the Civil Rights Division in its storied history and the highest ranking Federal Executive officer of Asian Pacific American heritage in our 200-year history.

I have previously brought to all Senators' attention a June letter from the Assistant Attorneys General for Civil Rights from the Eisenhower through Bush Administrations in support of this outstanding nominee: Harold Tyler, Burke Marshall, Stephen J. Pollak, J. Stanley Pottinger, Drew Days and John R. Dunne note in their letter:

Over the past eighteen months, Mr. Lee has shown that he honors the Civil Rights Division's mission to safeguard equal justice for all. He has enforced the nation's civil rights laws fairly and effectively. He has demonstrated that he can and will meet the demands of the position with distinction and thus merits the Senate's confidence.

Civil Rights is about human dignity and opportunity. Bill Lann Lee ought to have an up or down confirmation vote on the Senate floor. The Senate should fulfill its constitutional duty under the advice and consent clause and vote on this nomination. Twenty-four months and three sessions of Congress is too long for this nomination to have to wait. He should no longer be forced to ride in the back on the nominations bus but be given the fair vote that he deserves.

I have often referred to the Senate as acting at its best when it serves as the conscience of the nation. I call on the Judiciary Committee and the Senate to bring this nomination to the floor for an up or down vote without obstruction or further delay so that the Senate may vote and we may confirm a dedicated public servant to lead the Civil Rights Division into the next century. Racial discrimination, and harmful discrimination in all its forms, remain among the most vexing unsolved problems of our society. Let the Senate move forward from the ceremonial commemorations earlier this year by doing what is right and voting on the nomination of Bill Lann Lee.

SWEARING IN OF DIANE WATSON AS AMBASSADOR TO MICRONESIA

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, it is with real pleasure that I rise today to note the swearing-in this afternoon of California State Senator Diane Watson as United States Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia. Senator Watson's confirmation was a long time coming, and I am proud that today she will finally come to occupy the Ambassadorial posting which she so well deserves.

State Senator Watson was the first African-American woman elected to the California State Senate, and has represented California's 26th District—which includes Los Angeles, Culver City, Ladera Heights, Baldwin Hills, Palms, Miracle Mile, Mar Vista, Cheviot Hills, and Koreatown—since 1978. Senator Watson has been a real leader in California politics and community life, and has been in the forefront of the fight for civil rights and human rights in Los Angeles and the entire state of California for her entire career. She was a dedicated crusader in